

A.M.A. Policies

Some Questions Raised, and Some Answers

Because it makes good use of a forum for physicians, bringing light where light can be most helpful, the following exchange of letters is reprinted from the September 1961, issue of the *Bulletin* of the Alameda-Contra Costa Medical Association.

SOME QUESTIONS

Dr. David J. Dugan
President,
Alameda-Contra Costa Medical Association

Dear Dr. Dugan:

I have wanted to write to you for some time to express my concern to you and the other officials of the A.C.C.M.A. about what I feel to be the continued negativistic and destructive approach that the American Medical Association is taking toward the important medical and social issues of our time. Among those issues that concern me are the A.M.A.'s past opposition to group practice of medicine, their opposition to some aspects of social security, their present opposition to medical care for the aged under social security, their handling of foreign doctors, the opposition to full acceptance of osteopaths, the backing of the oral polio vaccine at the expense of the Salk injections, and numerous other stands they have taken. I feel that the A.M.A. policies are established by a small oligarchy of salaried employees and unrepresentative political physicians and I do not believe that these policies reflect the will of the majority of American physicians. If these policies of the A.M.A. are allowed to continue unchecked, I think they will paradoxically result in the very "socialized medicine," which the A.M.A. purports to oppose.

The California Medical Association has been a little more forward-looking than the A.M.A. and I think our own county medical society has been much more progressive and responsible in its actions. However, much more needs to be accomplished even though we are faced with the usual problems of apathy and lack of participation that exist in organizations.

Among the positive and responsible things which we as physicians should be doing are: Improving medical education by broadening the curriculum, developing more medical schools and admitting more students without regard to arbitrary quotas; making high quality medical (including psychiatric) care available to all at a cost they can manage; improving democratic procedures within medical associations in order to give voice to the average physician and prevent a self-perpetuating hierarchy from controlling official medical policies; seeking

out and disciplining questionable and unethical practices such as overcharging or needless hospitalization; strongly opposing quackery as in the chiropractic profession, faith healing, etc.; and rapidly accelerating reasonable and comprehensive voluntary health insurance plans so that government intervention will not be necessary.

I respectfully request that the A.C.C.M.A. Council institute procedures to amend our present by-laws so that membership in the C.M.A. and A.M.A. will be voluntary rather than compulsory. In this connection I would be interested in a summary of past legal rulings from courts on this requirement of concurrent membership and also on the question of hospitals requiring medical society membership for staff privileges. My interest here is in providing free choice to the individual physician in as many matters as possible.

I also request that the membership of the A.C.C.M.A. be polled on: (1) their support or disapproval of Medical Care for the Aged under Social Security; (2) their support or disapproval of A.M.A. policies in general and (3) their support or disapproval of the above-mentioned proposed amendment to the bylaws.

I raise these questions and make these requests out of a serious desire to constructively improve the practice of medicine and quality of medical care as well as a wish to reawaken the traditionally high standards and ethics of the medical profession. Medicine cannot stand still if it is to retain its traditional position of leadership and esteem in the community.

Sincerely,
(Name Withheld)

SOME ANSWERS

Dear Doctor:

At its August meeting, the Council of the A.C.C.M.A. heard and discussed your letter of July 26th, in which you comment critically on the attitudes and activities of the American Medical Association. The Council asked me to reply to your letter and to describe to you the Council's views and those of some of its members who also serve in capacities in the California Medical Association and the American Medical Association.

You mention the "A.M.A.'s past opposition to group practice of medicine." The A.M.A. has not opposed group medicine. In fact, a number of A.M.A. presidents, including its present president, have been participants in or founders of their own group practices. What A.M.A. has objected to is "contract practice" in which a patient makes a contract with a group of doctors which he cannot break during an illness without financial penalty. The